

Taken by Permission from "Our Living and Our Dead" of May, 1875.

The Bingham School.

By WALTER P. WILLIAMSON, EDITOR "TARBORO' SOUTHERNER."

One of the few things in this State which seems to be permanent, which is old and yet endowed with perpetual youth, is the BINGHAM SCHOOL, a sketch of which I give at the request of the editor of *Our Living and Our Dead*, my facts having been obtained from headquarters during a very recent visit to Mebaneville.

ITS ORIGIN AND FOUNDER.

From the last circular I quote the following paragraph, giving a brief sketch of the school, in the language of the proprietors: "This School was established in 1793, more than 80 years ago, by the Rev. Wm. Bingham, grandfather of the present proprietors, who taught first in Wilmington, then at Pittsboro', in Chatham County, and afterwards, till his death in 1825, at "Mt. Repose," in Orange County. The late Wm. J. Bingham took charge of the school at his father's death, and shortly afterwards removed it to Hillsboro', where he taught until 1844. Being unwilling to educate his own sons in a town, he removed to Oaks, twelve miles southwest of Hillsboro', where he continued to teach till 1865, his sons, William and Robert, being associated with him after 1857, and his nephew Wm. B. Lynch after 1862. It being difficult during the war to get supplies so far from the Railroad, in the hands of the late Col. Wm. Bingham, the School was again removed, during the winter of 1864-'5, to its present location, three-quarters of a mile from Mebaneville, a station on the N. C. R. R."

Of the Rev. Wm. Bingham, the founder of this School, but few of the present generation remember anything. He died 50 years ago. A few of his pupils are still alive, *rari nantes in gurgite vasto*—but almost all who were school-boys fifty years ago have passed away—and the boys of to-day, where will they be in fifty years? Suffice it to say of this first Bingham that he was a Protestant Irishman and was regularly and thoroughly educated in the old country. Towards the end of the last century his family became involved in one of the many unsuccessful efforts for Irish independence, an uncle, and perhaps other relatives, were put to death by the British soldiers, and he and at least one of the brothers, despairing of liberty at home, came to this country where the liberties of all were secure *then*, and for more than half a century after that time, whatever may be said of the present. His learning secured him employment, first in Wilmington, for several years at Chapel Hill, our State University,—then in its infancy—where he was Associate Principal for some time. At length he settled down in Orange County; was first Principal of Bingham School, which he taught with great success, for those days, till his death in 1825. He lies buried at Cross Roads Church, and his memory, like that of the just, is blessed.

THE LATE WM. J. BINGHAM.

The late Wm. J. Bingham, the oldest son of the Rev. Wm. Bingham, had just graduated with the highest honors at Chapel Hill and was studying law with Judge Murphy, when, about the middle of a session his father died. He left his law books temporarily as he supposed, and taught till the unexpired session ended—and at the earnest request of his pupils, he taught another and another session till at length the law was abandoned and he determined to devote his life to a business in which he felt sure he could be more useful, if less honored in the general acceptance of the word. His success was pre-eminent; and his reputation, though less brilliant than that of some of his cotemporaries, was more extensive than that of any one of the men of his day, and while he was a stern and rigid disciplinarian, I may say truly, though upon the testimony of others, that his pupils loved him like a father, and trusted him as a tender and sympathizing friend. His deeds of unostentatious charity are almost numberless. I venture to say he was the means of putting more teachers upon the rostrum, more professional men into the various professions, more preachers into the pulpit and more missionaries into the field than any ten other men in the State; and this beneficiary work is one the strongest precedents in the Bingham School, it being a fact that during the eighty (80) years of its existence no young man of good habits and of good capacity, has ever been refused admission for want of means to pay tuition. It is hardly possible that any other man can ever again be so pre-eminent in the State as Mr. Bingham was in his profession. He occupied an unoccupied field, and to remarkable opportunities he added remarkable ability. He raised teaching from an almost disreputable employment to an honorable profession. He raised tuition fees from \$20 per year at the highest, to \$150 per year. He refused 300 applications in a single year, and though he conscientiously avoided accumulating money, he became in spite of himself and his numerous charities, a man of comparative affluence. His pupils who became prominent in the various walks of life are legion. Many of them became successful teachers in this and other States. On this specific point, I need only add briefly, that Mr. Horner, of the Hillsboro' School, was prepared for College by Mr. Bingham, and that Mr. Faucette, of the Lenoir School, received all of his education, if I mistake not, from the same hand; and the Bingham School in the centre, with the Hillsboro' and Lenoir Schools on the right and left, occupy nearly the whole ground in North Carolina, and are controlled by men of Mr. Bingham's training.

W. J. BINGHAM & SONS.

In 1857, Mr. Bingham associated his sons, William and Robert, with him, they meantime having graduated with the highest honors of our then noble and flourishing, though now prostrate University. The number of pupils received was increased from thirty (to which number Mr. Bingham had limited himself for years), to sixty, and the tuition fees were raised from \$80 to \$150, which was then, as is the present tuition fee \$125 per year, the highest, I think, in the South; and the fact of being able to command the highest tuition fees, indicates the pre-eminence of this school *then*, as the same fact indicates the same pre-eminence *now*.

In the new firm the father took the beginning classes, the sons carried them on after he had given them their initiatory training. The system of rigid, test examinations, which still continues, was introduced, conducted in writing, strictly private, and lasted often for ten hours. All inferior material was thrown over by this means and the best results were obtained. The first class that went to college under the new order of things is a fair test of the methods practiced. For many years, as many I suppose as two-thirds of the first honor graduates at the University had been pupils of Mr. Bingham's. This first class from the hands of the new firm held a still more honorable position. The class consisted of five members. Four of them took the first distinction and one the second, and in a class of over eighty, there were besides these four "Binghamites" but one other first honor man, he being from Mr. Horner's. The new firm built a new, handsome and commodious academy, and seemed to be starting upon a career of great success and usefulness when the war broke out.

DURING THE WAR.

Soon after the war broke out, Maj. Ro. Bingham, the present Superintendent, then junior member of the firm of W. J. Bingham & Sons, buckled on his sword and went to the front, where he gallantly fought and remained till the war closed, surrendering at Appomattox Court-house, with that glorious remnant of the Army of Northern Virginia. And as Maj. Bingham is now the head of a school with a military organization, it may not be amiss to say a word as to his army record, which I get direct from a fellow-townsmen, who was also a very gallant officer in the same regiment:

"The Superintendent of the BINGHAM SCHOOL is the only head of a military institution of the kind in the State who went to the war in the beginning and remained there until the end. His character as a commander of men and his gallantry in action were surpassed by none. His regiment was never under fire without him,—except for a few months when he was in a Federal prison—and his company stood at the head of the list in point of discipline. In enforcing obedience it was done in kindness, and his conduct was such as to gain not only the respect of his men but their affections also. When in command of the regiment, which was often the case, the result was equally the same.

"It was unfair for himself and Maj. C. M. Steadman to do all the duties of the regiment without promotion simply because the Colonel was at home sick most of the time, and the Lieutenant-Colonel in prison till the end of the war. Efforts to promote both of these gallant officers in their own and other regiments failed, only because promotion was by seniority and not by merit.

"Experience is a dear lesson. It is the best qualification for the head of a military school to have. It makes the possessor both a soldier and a disciplinarian."

But to return. As the junior member of the firm was in the army, and as the health of the senior member, who was now getting to be an old man, began to decline and continued to do so till his death soon after the end of the war, a very heavy burden fell upon Col. Wm. Bingham, who had always been a delicate man and on that account was restrained from going into the army. But the burden only served to develop his innate qualities of head and heart, and he proved equal to, and superior to every emergency. Amidst the difficulties of a depreciated currency, of a chronic state of excitement, of anxiety and distress, and amidst the frequent calls upon him and his pupils to do military duty as a home police force, the school went steadily and successfully on. Several wounded officers from the army, among them Capt. Thomas L. Norwood, a member of the present faculty, assisted temporarily in the teaching; and still later, Major Lynch, one of the present proprietors, then Professor of Greek at Davidson College, came into the school. He was also a first honor graduate of the University of North Carolina in its best days, and being a grandson of the first Wm. Bingham, a nephew of the second, a first cousin of the third, he has a blood right to the teaching capacity which seems inherent in the Bingham family. After continuing the school successfully, though under great difficulties, it became impossible to sustain it longer at Oaks, its location at the time and ten miles from the railroad; and so the school was placed under a regular military organization, its officers were commissioned by the State, its cadets were exempted from duty as Junior Reserves till they were 18, and to procure supplies, &c., it was removed to its present location, three-quarters of a mile from the Mebaneville depot on the North Carolina Railroad.

PRESENT LOCATION—ITS ADVANTAGES.

For reasons sufficiently explained in the quotation made at the first of this sketch, the BINGHAM SCHOOL has been somewhat migratory. Its first Principal moved it from Chatham to Orange and located it at Mt. Repose, some five miles from Mebaneville depot. Its second Principal moved it thence to Hillsborough, in 1827, and in 1844 from Hillsborough to Oaks, ten miles in the country. Its third Principal moved it again to its present location; and as a location for a school Mebaneville is all that can be desired by parents who wish to secure for their sons freedom from distracting influences of all kinds, but especially freedom from temptations to vice and extravagance. On the point of location the words of the last school circular may again be quoted, the language of which is as follows:

"Having had long personal and much longer traditional experience in teaching boys, both in town and in the country, we greatly prefer the country for a male school, as affording the fewest possible causes of diversion from study, the fewest temptations to extravagance, and lastly and especially the fewest temptations to dissipation. In this view of the case Mebaneville cannot be surpassed as a location for a school like this. Being on the North Carolina Railroad, it is easy of access; the surrounding country is exceedingly healthful; the community is noted for its morality: the sale of ardent spirits is prohibited by law within two miles of the station; so that parents may rest assured that their sons are as safe here from all external and distracting influences as it is possible to be anywhere."

Being thoroughly acquainted with the neighborhood from a sojourn of several years as a member of the Bingham School, I must fully endorse this statement. And this choice of location was made and persisted in, in the face of numerous and flattering and repeated offers from other points. The Charlotte building was several times offered. The Hillsborough building was also repeatedly and very lately offered. From several points in the State offers have come to put up such buildings as might be desired on condition of their being occupied by the Bingham School. But these offers have always been from towns and have therefore been uniformly declined. With their convictions of their duty to God, to their patrons and to their pupils, the proprietors say that for the advantages of "society," &c., which at best are very questionable for boys, whose business at a school is to learn, and who have ample opportunities of society at home, in vacation at any rate; that for questionable advantages of this kind they cannot expose their pupils to the unquestionable and very greatly increased temptations to extravagance and vice which are inseparable from towns. And also so long as they can sustain themselves in the country, that they cannot agree to an influx of local pupils, which a town of any size would supply, comfortably enough for their income, but unsatisfactorily for the discipline and animus of a school, where external and distracting influences, such as a considerable local patronage must introduce, will always do harm and cause trouble. And so, to secure a maximum of application, morals and general good conduct at a minimum loss of freedom and legitimate enjoyment on the part of the pupil, and at a minimum exercise of authority and severity of discipline on the part of the teachers, and at a minimum expense in the way of spending money on the part of parents, the Bingham School, despite numerous and flattering offers to the contrary, remains in the country, greatly to the advantage of its students in all respects, though doubtless at a pecuniary sacrifice to its proprietors.

THE BUILDINGS.

Just before the war, as already stated, a handsome academy had been erected at Oaks, which of course could not be utilized at Mebaneville. The transfer to Mebaneville was in the last year of the war when it was impossible to get materials for suitable buildings; and so temporary single story quarters were erected of logs, in the shape of a hollow square—which plan for a boys' school has the greatest advantages over a three or four story building. Any unprejudiced judge must be convinced of this by a very cursory examination. The greater convenience of single story quarters, for a school under a military organization, where servants are allowed to a very limited extent if at all, is obvious. The advantages in the way of health from the freer access of air and sunshine is equally obvious. The diminished danger from fire, epidemics, &c., and from such dangers as falling, somnambulism and the like, (which dangers must be considerable in high and crowded buildings,) are worthy of note by parents. But perhaps the greatest advantage of a hollow square of single story quarters is the ease with which quiet and order can be secured, not by severity, but by the certainty of any disorder's being observed, as the whole campus and the door of every dormitory can be commanded at a glance by school and cadet officers. Thus the studios have least interruption in their work, even necessary noises in quarters being over nobody's head, while the idle and disorderly, if there are such, are restrained in all school and study hours when order and quiet are enjoined, by the certainty that a serious disorder must be observed. But to return to the present buildings. They are comfortable enough, as I can say from personal experience, but

have always been considered merely temporary. Permanent buildings were about to be erected in '67, when the cotton crash paralyzed the country. Again in 1871, the buildings were in contemplation, when Col. Bingham's ill-health and subsequent death postponed the work. I am glad to be able to say that the necessities of the school require, and its prosperity justifies the outlay for a new academy, to contain recitation and school rooms below, and society halls and an audience hall above—and for new quarters. These improvements will almost certainly be completed by the beginning of the next session, July 28th. The plan of the present school buildings will be retained, namely: a hollow square of single story dormitories connected by a continuous gallery. The rooms will be large, airy, thoroughly comfortable; and the plan of the buildings will secure to an eminent degree, quiet, good order, convenience and safety against fire and accidents, while the academy buildings will be commodious and sufficiently handsome for all practical purposes. And as this school has so fully sustained itself under the great disadvantage of inferior appointments, which I doubt if any other school could have lived under at all, its friends may expect for it a new and greatly increased tide of usefulness and success, when its appointments in all respects but for the merest show shall be equal to, and in many important respects, superior to any others in the State.

ITS CHARITIES.

Under this head I need not do more than quote Art. 18, from the last circular:

"We make a standing offer to such Ministers of the Gospel of all denominations as are engaged in regular ministerial work to educate their sons *free of tuition*. We offer the same terms as to tuition to the orphans of Ministers of the Gospel; to candidates for the Gospel Ministry, irrespective of denomination; to the sons of deceased Masons who are without means; and also to any worthy and indigent young man whose board any Church or Masonic Lodge will pay. And further, we have never refused to teach *any* young man of good habits and good capacity who desires an education and can only pay board, taking his note for his tuition, which note shall be payable when he shall have made the money himself to pay it. Every candidate for the ministry will give the same kind of note for tuition, which note will be cancelled upon presentation of license to preach. All such as accept the terms offered in this article *must be docile and must enter one of our regular classes*."

This gratuitous work is one of the strongest precedents of the school and the offer is published, not ostentatiously, but that those who might be benefitted may be informed that such an offer is made—and it is a sad comment upon the condition of the country that but few are able to take advantage of an offer made to the same extent by no other school in the country, and which puts an education within the reach of even limited means.

AVERAGE EXPENSES.

This has been considered an expensive school; but as compared with schools of the same grade, such a notion is not correct. The tuition is somewhat higher, but other expenses are somewhat less than at other first class schools. Besides this, every effort is made to repress extravagance. There are no extra and unexpected charges made. There are very few temptations to spend money, there not being even a soda fountain at the station. Patrons are requested not to supply pocket money too freely, on which head I again quote the circular, which makes no doubtful sound:

"But little pocket money is needed here. Its unrestricted use is everywhere and to all boys injurious, and to many ruinous, supplying as it does the temptation to, as well as the means for, dissipation; and besides the injurious effects upon boys, the expenses of education are greatly increased by the injudicious freedom with which many parents supply their children with spending money. A boy should not feel humiliated by not having the means to buy what his comrades buy, and what is right and proper that they should buy; nor should he feel that he has money to spend foolishly or for worse purposes. Beyond about \$5, which is necessary to purchase lamp, oil, blacking, &c., we most earnestly request that no boy be allowed more than \$2 per month, and \$1 per month would be a safer allowance in most cases."

And so earnest is the effort of the faculty to secure the progress of their pupils that in the long run, considering what a student *gets*, as well as what he *pays* for it, those who know most of the school think it one of the cheapest, instead of the dearest, in the country.

WHO ITS PATRONS ARE.

On this head I notice on the last catalogue that there are 93 names, from *nine* Southern States: Virginia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Georgia, Florida, Tennessee, Mississippi, Arkansas and Texas—a range of patronage much beyond that of any other School in the State. And to give an idea of what class of men have sons there, I call attention to the fact that in Raleigh, for instance, some of its patrons are such men as Hon. Kemp P. Battle, Hon. B. F. Moore, the late Hon. D. M. Barringer, Hon. W. N. H. Smith, while some of its patrons in my own county, Edgecombe, are W. S. Battle, Esq., Dr. N. J. Pittman, Dr. A. H. McNair and Mrs. M. S. Powell. All the persons named occupy the highest positions, and would be satisfied with nothing short of the very best opportunities for their sons.

UNSECTARIAN AND MORAL CHARACTER.

From the circular I quote the following:

"This School is without sectarian or other bias. Three religious denominations, the Presbyterian, the Episcopal and the Baptist are represented in the Faculty, and we make the same beneficiary offer to the sons of all ministers of the gospel, and to all candidates for the ministry, irrespective of denomination. Attendance at church on Sunday morning, upon Bible lesson Sunday afternoon, and upon the morning prayers at the opening of school, where each member of the Faculty officiates in turn, are the only obligatory religious exercises."

While there is no sectarianism or want of liberality, there is a high moral tone pervading the school. The faculty, both by precept and example, strive to keep up a high standard of morality—giving no uncertain sound on this point. They say in the circular "our aim is to develop cultivated Christian gentlemen," and the same key-note is distinctly sounded in the "Orders"—General Orders, No. 1, being:

"The cadets of the Bingham School are expected and required to deport themselves like gentlemen, abstaining from all low immoral conduct, forbidden alike by the word of God and the usages of good society."

And the best results are obtained, not by any undue or burdensome moral and religious teachings; but by so cultivating the moral sense and the sense of honor as gentlemen, that the cadets become a law to themselves. By this means profanity has become uncommon, a boy who would tell an untruth openly would be scorned and tabooed by his comrades, and what is still more remarkable, *drinking* has ceased to be practiced at all. By degrees a high standard of honor in matters between teacher and pupil, as well as between cadet and cadet, has been attained; and as no boy can enter the school except upon a solemn pledge not to drink anything intoxicating during the session, and as no boy can break a pledge taken as a gentleman, and retain the respect of his associates, this pledge has been scrupulously kept for more than three sessions, and I fully believe that if a cadet were to break it, his fellow students would insist that he should be expelled forthwith, and I fully believe that most boys would be safer morally, at the Bingham School than at home. Can this be said of many other boarding schools?

COL. WM. BINGHAM.

Any sketch of this school would be imperfect which failed to pay a tribute to the memory of Wm. Bingham. At the time of his death, he had been in charge of the school about eight years only, and he had been teaching only about fifteen years. He died at 37, in

the very prime of his life, when most men have as yet scarcely attained the full maturity of their powers. But he was a man in the fullest sense of the word, and if what is accomplished is the measure of the length of a life, his was a long, laborious and most useful life. Few authors have attained the same degree of success. His series of Latin text books has received the highest praise from the highest sources, and are more extensively used probably than any other text books by a Southern author. In reply to a recent letter of inquiry on the subject the publishers say, "we think you are perfectly safe in saying Bingham's Latin series is used in *every State in the Union*." Northern text-books have been used in the South, but I think this is the only Southern classical text-book which is used North, South, East and West; and their extensive use, especially North and West, is a striking tribute to the excellence of Bingham's series. How many North Carolina people know the facts about these North Carolina books, or about this North Carolina author? But Col. Bingham was remarkable in other respects,—his powers as a speaker were remarkable; his capacity and tact as a teacher were of the highest order. But perhaps his most remarkable power was in the influence for good which he exerted over his pupils by his earnest piety, his fervent zeal and his lovely religious character.

UNDER THE PRESENT ADMINISTRATION.

At Col. Bingham's death, Major R. Bingham became Superintendent, for which post he had special qualifications. Having been associated with his father and brother for years, he had the benefit of their methods, as well as the traditions and usages of the school. He had the same colleagues by whose aid the school had been so successfully conducted for several previous years. He had the practical experience of having been in charge during his brother's illness, which lasted for some time. He had the advantage of not being a book maker, upon which occupation Col. Bingham spent some of his best energies. But in one respect he has an advantage enjoyed by neither his father nor his brother, nor by the head of any other prominent school in the State at this time. He had commanded men successfully for four years in the army and the value of this training is of very great practical value, not only as concerns mere drill and discipline, but as giving a knowledge of character and as making the wants of the soldier, and, of course, in a different sphere, of the Cadet, an habitual care, and attention to these wants a constant and imperative duty. And so, while the friends of the School felt that in the death of Col. Bingham it had suffered an irreparable loss, at the same time they felt that there was a man to stand in some sense in his room, tho' no man could fill it in all respects. The results have fully justified these expectations. For at least five years, under agencies put into operation by Col. Bingham, the "morale" of the school has been steadily improving, and under the present administration this improvement has been rapid and cumulative, so that justice to the present faculty requires it to be said that there never has been a time when the status of morals, of application, or school pride, of satisfaction with the school, both on the part of pupil and patron, was as great as it is now. On this point of the present status of the school, I cannot do better than quote a few words from the annual address of John Nichols, Grand Master of Masons, who visited the school officially in the interests of Masonic Orphans, to whom certain beneficiary offers had been made, reporting his impression in his address before the Grand Lodge, Dec. 7, 1874. After referring to the offer to the orphans of Masons, he says:

"A word as to the history of this school may not be amiss in this place. The school was founded in 1793 by Rev. Wm. Bingham, a prominent Mason, and for several years, between 1780 and 1790, Master of the Lodge in Wilmington. It is one of the oldest, if not the oldest school in the South, and has been pre-eminent in North Carolina for three quarters of a century. Its graduates are numbered by thousands, and have occupied the highest positions in every department, civil, ecclesiastical, political, military and educational. Many of the most distinguished teachers of the South received part, and some of them all, of their education at this school; and to-day a certificate of proficiency from its faculty is worth more than a diploma from many of the colleges of the country.

"This celebrated school, founded by a Mason, and which now makes this liberal offer to the orphan sons of our deceased brethren, is still in the hands of Masons; and as it stands foremost among the schools of the country, the generous offer of the proprietors is far beyond anything ever known in North Carolina, from a private enterprise.

"Although this offer has been read in most of the Lodges in the State, I regret to learn that so few have availed themselves of its benefits, and fearing it might not be thoroughly understood, I felt it my duty to bring the matter to the attention of the Grand Lodge; and in order that I might inform myself of the present condition and status of the school, and thus be better able to report to you on the subject, I visited it in October last and attended the recitations, noticed the methods of instruction, conversed freely with teachers and pupils, and left thoroughly convinced that the school fully merits the extended and favorable reputation it sustains before the public. The faculty is composed of gentlemen of superior qualifications, while the discipline of the school seems to be perfect. Idleness is not tolerated, and while the administration is firm it is not severe. Good order without tyranny is strictly enforced, and economy without parsimony is invariably required. It affords me pleasure, therefore, to submit the liberal proposition made by the generous proprietors of this school, to commend it to all those who are seeking a school for their sons, as one possessing superior excellencies, and in every way worthy of the confidence and support of the fraternity."

Such an endorsement from such a source carries the greatest weight with it.

In order to acquaint myself with the facts given in the preceding pages, I visited the school myself about the middle of February, and that I might be better able to give the facts as they really exist, I mingled freely with the Cadets themselves, and got the outlook from their standpoint, and they are by far the best judges.

In conclusion, I feel confident that the BINGHAM SCHOOL will continue to prosper, increase its reputation and stand foremost, as it has heretofore done, in the cause of polite learning, and the dissemination of knowledge, gentlemanly habits, and morality among the youth of our State and common country.